

SPECIAL BUDGET EDITION

GRADUATE RETENTION PROGRAM RESTRUCTURED



University of Regina president Vianne Timmons says the lean budget will result in job and budget cuts at the university.

Photo by Dylan Bernhardt

Dylan Bernhardt
@dylanbernhardt

Being a student has never been tougher. With Saskatchewan's budget out today, it doesn't look like it will get any easier. Along with an overall reduction of funding to advanced education, the Sask Party government has restructured its Graduate Retention Program.

The program was envisioned as an incentive to keep recently-graduated students in Saskatchewan. The plan originally entailed a refundable tax credit based on tuition over a seven-year period following graduation.

However, Finance Minister Ken Krawetz announced during the budget address today that the plan would be restructured. The new structure would last for 10 years after graduation, but would only go towards a non-refundable Saskatchewan tax credit. This means that the program will likely be less beneficial for lower-income graduates.

"If you look across the piece here, in the province of Saskatchewan, our government has been moving

almost consistently to a non-refundable tax credit kind of regime," said Kevin Doherty, minister of advanced education.

"One of the virtues of the program previously was that it was a bit more universal in its application. Now, of course, if you are not making the big bucks, it's not going to be as valuable," said Warren McCall, the NDP

"IT'S GOING TO BE A TOUGH YEAR FOR STUDENTS."

- DEVON PETERS

critic for advanced education.

"Broadly, it's going to be a tough year for students. The move to make the graduate retention program a non-refundable tax credit is going to make those first few years after graduation particularly tough for some students," said Devin Peters, president of University of Regina Student Union.

Another concern has been that graduate students have never had access to the program.

"I've certainly heard from graduate students that were interested

in making sure their interests were represented with the government. They were interested in seeing the retention program extended to them, but we don't see that here today," said McCall.

Some are more positive about the changes.

They've extended it over 10 years, which is positive for our students and our graduates. So we'll see. We hope to see our students stay in the province and it is an incentive," said Vianne Timmons, president and vice-chancellor of the University of Regina.

Barnhart also noted the success of the program so far.

"Students that I used to have had come back to the province or stayed in the province because of the benefits on their taxes," said Barnhart.

However, this news comes alongside a lean budget that has raised concerns. The budget will see an overall decrease, with spending on students supports dropping from \$81 million to \$56 million.

"On one hand there is some

SASK BUDGET OVERVIEW

Paige Kreutzwieser
@paigekreutz

Budget day has come and gone at the Saskatchewan Legislature. This year, the Saskatchewan Party is looking to put more shovels in the ground.

The government budgeted \$14.17 billion in spending for 2016, more than any other year in Saskatchewan's history. Despite being hit hard by the collapsing price of oil last year, the 2015/16 Saskatchewan Budget shows a surplus of \$107 million.

One of the budget's biggest impacts is the Saskatchewan Builds Capital Plan. The Plan, consisting of a whopping \$5.8 billion over four years, will fund upgrades to

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SASKATCHEWAN INFRASTRUCTURE BOOSTED



Construction workers develop the new Mosaic Stadium in Regina, Saskatchewan, which should be finished in 2017.

Photo by Alec Salloum

Carlos Prieto
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The Saskatchewan provincial budget 2015-16 will continue to fund infrastructure projects for Regina, but it also presents lack of funding in other important areas of the city. The budget, presented on March 18, showed considerable funding for projects like the Regina Bypass, which received \$211.0 million, and \$1.2 million for twinning Highways 5 and 39 from Regina to Estevan.

Nancy Heppner, minister of highways and infrastructure, said she was very pleased with this budget. "While provincial revenues have been hit, we don't want to affect the economy. And if we stop building, that is what's going to happen," Heppner said. Heppner also mentioned this year's budget presented a 27 per cent increase over 2014-15, which was a record year for infrastructure in the province.

Regina mayor Michael Fougere said he expected to see more investment in infrastructure; however he said he understood things can't be done all at once. "When the economy begins to soften and there's

concern, that's the time when the government should invest in infrastructure," said Fougere. "We have seen that in 2009, 2008 with the slow-down, and we see that again now. It's time to invest and they're going to do that, and that's good news," said Fougere.

Some are worried that the budget will present cuts in areas like health and education.

A \$157.4 million fund was allo-

"THEY MIGHT BE BUILDING NEW SCHOOLS, BUT WE DON'T HAVE THE STAFF TO PROVIDE THE EDUCATION."

-BARBARA CAPE

cated for planning and further construction of nine joint-use schools across the province, three of which are planned to be located in Regina. However, the concerns for many come for staff costs.

Barbara Cape, president of Service Employees International Union West, said she was disappointed. "They might be building new schools, but we don't have the staff to provide the education," Cape said.

"We are looking ahead to see what kind of operational spending there is," said Randy Cline, vice-president

of Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation. He added that there must be a balance between school plans and the support of teachers. "Teachers are trying to do the best to ensure students' success, but they need the resources and supports to do that, and that is operational expenses," Cline said.

Maintenance capital for health care received \$27.8 million, which represents a 19.3 per cent over

last year. But operational funding remains largely stagnant, according to Cape. "This budget leaves so much to be desired when it comes to health care," said Cape, who added that people who work in the front line of health care see short staffing, cut of positions and growth of part-time and casual job positions.

"People who are actually suffering are residents, patients, and clients," she said. In her opinion, the province is going to have a hard time finding people to work in health care and education

The Saskatchewan Housing Corporation is another sector experiencing a major cut. From a \$7 million allocation last year, the 2015-16 budget grants only \$1.5 million, which represents a 78 per cent cut.

"Sask Housing is removing itself from the housing programs directly. We partner with them to provide what we can for housing," said Mayor Fougere, who mentioned Regina's vacancy rates went up to 3.3 per cent, which represents a success in improving the city's housing.

Peter Gilmer, staff member of the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry, said there has been no expansion in social housing in a time where the province has had a major housing crisis.

"Over the course of the last year we saw a significant loss of social housing," said Gilmer. He said the provincial government needs to provide necessary resources to help projects that have been considered by the city. Gilmer said the increase of vacancy rates in Regina has not been accompanied by an increase in affordable housing, but instead has been followed by an increase of costs and rents in the city.

BUILDING SASKATCHEWAN'S HEALTH



Health Minister Dustin Duncan talks to reporters on Budget Day. This year, Saskatchewan is investing more than \$5 billion in health.

Photo by Rebekah Lesko

Rebekah Lesko @bekalesko

Saskatchewan's health is claiming over a third of the province's entire 2015-2016 budget.

For another consecutive year, Saskatchewan is investing a record-setting number in health. The number is \$5.12 billion. This is a 2.7 per cent increase from last year, an increase of \$135 million.

The 13 Regional Health Authorities and Saskatchewan Cancer Agency received the majority of \$3.31 billion, a funding increase of \$55.7 million compared to last year.

As well, there will be investments in seniors' care, programs aimed at reducing emergency department wait times and major capital projects, according to Finance Minister Ken Krawetz.

Health capital spending is sitting at \$256.4 million for infrastructure for the year. The current plan is to invest over \$700 million in health facilities over the next four years.

Health Minister Dustin Duncan said "moving forward with some

capital projects has been a long time coming"

"Two-thirds of health facilities were built before 1970, so we have a long ways to go, and we're going to keep chipping away at it," said Duncan. "We are starting to plan for new facilities because at some point it doesn't make sense to put money into older facilities. That's a part of the balancing act that we're trying to play as well."

However, there has been \$27.8 million for critical infrastructure repairs of health facilities.

But Danielle Chartier, health critic for the NDP said "the \$28 million is a drop in the bucket."

"Last year, we had to pry from the government a report the government had done on infrastructure which clearly illustrates \$2.2 billion dollars (is needed), and that's a conservative estimate in health care infrastructure across the province," Chartier said.

Barbara Cape, president of Service Employees International Union West repeated a similar deficit figure.

"With health care, all of us in this province should be concerned. We're facing a \$2.2 billion dollar health care infrastructure funding deficit. That means our buildings are actually crumbling. For example, Royal University Hospital in Saskatoon is one frayed wire away from the whole place shutting down. And we're talking about operating rooms and maternity and delivery wards."

Cape explained an independent consultant did a review of facilities in Saskatchewan and came up with the \$2.2 billion deficit.

"These places should be cathedrals. This is where our family members go at a time of crisis. We need to pay attention to these things," Cape said.

"We need to be smarter with the way we are addressing some of these issues. If we think that just putting more money into the system, without changing the system is going to help the system, that hasn't helped in the past," said Duncan.

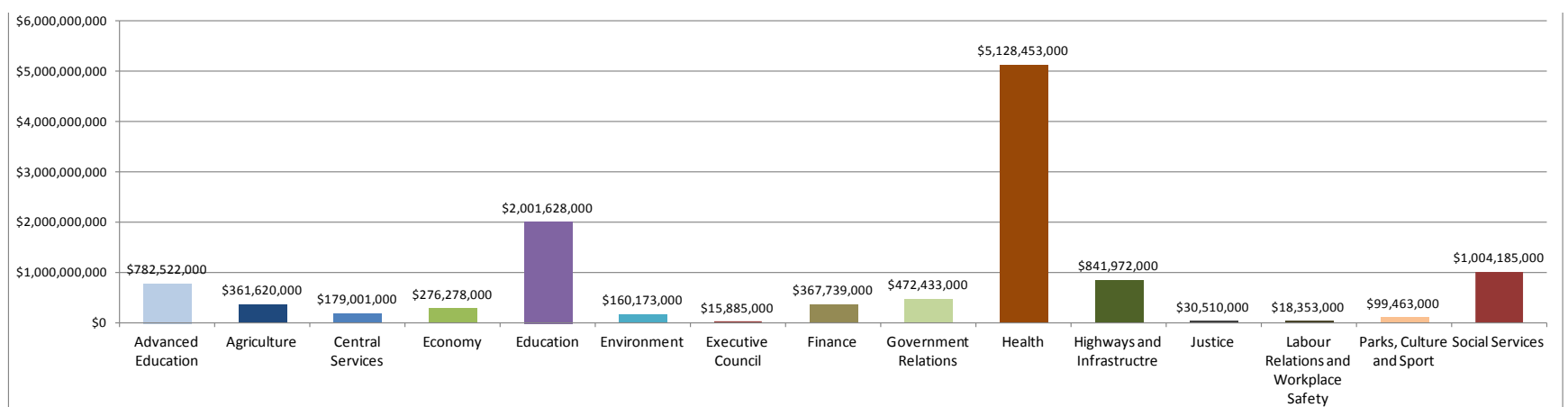
The major capital projects currently underway include the new Children's Hospital in Saskatoon

and the completion of the hospital in Moose Jaw (\$7.8 million). Duncan claimed the hospital in Moose Jaw aims to finish by May and move in this summer.

As well, \$129 million was allocated to begin construction to replace the Saskatchewan Hospital at North Battleford. This will first undergo a public-private partnership procurement evaluation. For Swift Current, a long-term care facility is being built using a P3 procurement model, which is estimated at \$64.9 million. "Swift Current is a big project for the southwest and for the province. It's 220 beds," Duncan said.

In addition, \$6.2 million is budgeted to start construction of the Leader care facility, which is expected to be ready March 2017. "Leader is a great project. That's going to take four different community facilities and combine them into one facility," Duncan said. There is also planning for rejuvenation of the Victoria Hospital in Prince Albert and replacement of long-term care facilities in Regina and La Ronge.

SASKATCHEWAN 2015-16 PROVINCIAL BUDGET PER AREA



BUDGET OVERVIEW



NDP's Cam Broten (left) and Saskatchewan Party's Brad Wall (right) don't see the budget the same way.

Photo by Paige Kreutzwieser

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the province's highways, schools, health care facilities, and other areas. The plan involves \$700 million in borrowed money for notable infrastructure projects, including the proposed \$211 million Regina bypass project and another \$337.8 million in highway construction.

"The Saskatchewan Builds Capital Plan is ambitious," said Minister of Finance Ken Krawetz. "But at a time when we face revenue challenges, our government faced a choice. Do we delay and cancel projects, or do we keep building?"

"We chose to keep building."

Saskatchewan's Crown corporations, such as SaskPower, SaskEnergy, and SaskTel, will spend another \$2 billion this year on infrastructure. This spending includes a \$1.2 billion project to SaskPower to fix transmission and power distribution systems. The infrastructure funding comes at a crucial time for the province as Saskatchewan's highway system has not grown as fast as Saskatchewan's population.

While the fund is scheduled to build brand new schools in Warman, Gravelbourg, and Hudson Bay, Saskatchewan's existing schools are in need of repair. A 2013 report by the Saskatchewan School Board Association discovered that, "beyond the need for new school facilities, approximately 75 percent of the roofing systems in Saskatchewan schools will fail within the next five

years. Furthermore, the average age of Saskatchewan schools is approximately 50 years."

Despite this report, additional money will not be pledged to repair existing schools in this year's budget. The Ministry of Education's budget has also been cut by \$4.2 million this year.

"The government won't pass the benefit of higher revenues onto everyday families," said Trent Wotherspoon, the Opposition's Finance critic. Cam Broten, the leader of the Saskatchewan NDP, agrees, saying, "There's no commitment here to actually fix the things that families are caring about the most."

Crowded classrooms, limited school resources, and the failure to

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ABOUT THE MOST."**

- CAM BROTEN

address infrastructure in hospitals and senior care homes are some of the NDP's biggest concerns.

Advanced education will also take a financial hit under this year's budget, as both the Innovation and Science Fund and the Science and Technology Research Fund have had their funding cut off. Between the two, Saskatchewan's Ministry of Advanced Education will be losing money to the tune of more than \$15 million.

For University of Regina President Vianne Timmons, today's budget announcement is difficult news. "I have no doubt that today's provincial budget will necessitate difficult decisions at our university," she said. The U of R, along with the rest of Saskatchewan's universities and colleges, is facing high cuts under this year's budget. More than \$12 million is being cut from the funding envelope for universities and colleges, about 2.5 per cent of their annual funds.

The budget also contained bad news for several demographic groups. Saskatchewan's Graduate Retention Plan, a key part of keeping Saskatchewan's brightest minds in the province after graduating, saw

year, Sask Housing will run mostly on internal funds.

Cuts are coming to the Seniors' Drug Plan, as the maximum qualification income for the program has been lowered to \$65,515 per year. Early estimates say more than 6,000 Saskatchewan seniors will lose their Plan eligibility after the changes take effect on July 1.

The province's Research and Development Tax Credit has also been drastically changed. The Tax Credit is now non-refundable and shrinking from 15 per cent to 10 per cent of qualifying expenditures.

Saskatchewan's Active Families Benefit is also seeing restrictions, as only families with an annual income less than \$60,000 will qualify. Saskatchewan's Employment Supplement is also seeing a change in rules, as now only families with children 12 years of age or younger will qualify. In past years, families with children up to 18 years of age were eligible.

Krawetz announced that he was pleased with this year's budget, his last as finance minister. "I'm proud of the last five budgets, and I'm especially proud of this one," he said.

Wotherspoon said it's the same old song and dance from the Sask Party each year, but the auditors may be hearing a different tune.

"The public accounts, when the ink dries at the end of the year, may tell a different story."

drastic changes. Instead of running for seven years with a 10 per cent tax rebate in the first four and a 20 per cent tax rebate in the last three, the revised program will run for 10 years at a constant 10 per cent rebate.

Out of all provincial agencies, the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation was hit hardest by the budget axe, facing \$5.5 million in cuts this fiscal year. Saskatchewan Finance Minister Ken Krawetz stated that for the next

GRAD RETENTION ... continued from page 1

really good news in there, and there is some parts that we wish was a wee bit better," said Gordon Barnhart, president of the University of Saskatchewan.

Timmons went on to say that the university had requested a four per cent increase, but will only receive one per cent.

The tighter budget has also put pressure on the university.

"We're pretty lean as an institution. There's not much extra we have on campus. We have done the early retirement program, we have looked at efficiency, so it's going to be positions. My hope is that we can do them through attrition, but we

will have to get rid of positions on our campus," said Timmons.

"One per cent is an increase, but it's not a sustainable one," said Peters.

"I think students are going to be confronted with costs going up. We are going to see tuition go up yet again. We are going to see cuts to

staff and faculty. So on the whole, I don't think this is going to be a very good budget for students," said McCall.

"We need to have students getting the funding they need to make education in this province excellent, so in the future students will want to come to the U of R," said Peters.

RELYING ON POTASH AMID FALLING OIL PRICES



The Saskatchewan budget will implement the Potash Production Tax to help make up the \$661 million decline in oil revenue.

Photo by Alec Salloum

Alec Salloum
@alecsalloum

Oil revenues in Saskatchewan declined \$661 million from last year's budget; however the government is betting on potash to balance this year's books.

Crude oil prices have plummeted in recent months for a number of reasons, but in Canada thousands of workers have been laid off, fewer oil wells are being drilled, and economies are struggling. Alberta has experienced a hiring freeze, and could be facing a revenue shortfall of \$7 billion.

Despite the falling price of oil, Saskatchewan has been able to diversify, avoiding a potential shortfall. Oil was expected to account for 11 per cent of all revenues in last year's budget but in reality only provided 6 per cent. The government is seeking economic diversity in the potash industry, which will experience tax incentives and predicted substantial growth this coming year.

"I think this is a feather in the cap with the Saskatchewan economy in a year like this, where we do have some challenges in regards to the oil revenues but we do have some

other industries that are really performing well," said Scott Moe, minister of the environment.

To boost the government's potash revenues, interim taxation changes will be made. With these changes potash revenues are expected to be up "\$400 million over last year's budget," according to a news release from Deb Young from the ministry of economy.

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The new taxation structure of the potash production tax (PPT) will grant a "120 per cent super-deduction rate" on all capital expenditures in excess of revenues required to maintain operations.

With new tax deductibles on all capital expenditure for potash extraction and sales companies like Potash Corp. will pay an additional \$100 million in tax, according to the government.

"I guess we'll see at the end of the year. Certainly the adjustment in the Canadian dollar has a significant impact on the potash industry," said

Trent Wotherspoon, NDP deputy leader.

"Every year (the government) comes out and they sing this song about budgetary balance and then the actual numbers roll in. Even through the best years of revenue through almost a decade-long boom, this government has struggled to balance the books at the end of the year," he said. "They've added debt,

they haven't been able to save a dime for long-term savings, so their history isn't one of putting forward responsible, sound budget."

Though potash could offer a short-term solution to Saskatchewan's current budgetary problems, potash revenues have generated little income for the province so far.

For example, in 2012 potash sales totaled in excess of \$5 billion, but the province only saw seven per cent of the sales via royalties.

John Burton, a former CCF member and author of *Potash: An Inside Account* of Saskatchewan's Pink

Gold, advises a cautious approach when relying on potash as a main revenue stream. "Potash is going to be around for a long time. And the industry will have its ups and downs. You don't just develop a policy based on what's happening at the moment or what happens in one particular year," said Burton.

Saskatchewan has the largest potash reserves on the planet, accounting for approximately 53 per cent of global reserves. "Certainly the potash industry is an important one to Saskatchewan. World class resource, world

class producers, exceptional workers and it's important to our province," said Wotherspoon.

However, the nature and application of potash can also affect the global price and demand, which could impact our budget next year. "Potash, in many parts of the world where it's used does not need to be used every single year. That then gives the buyers some strength if the potash prices go too high then they can say 'Stuff it - we can wait it out,'" said Burton.

ACTIVE FAMILIES BENEFIT ALTERS ELIGIBILITY



The Active Families Benefit is now open only to families with a net combined income of up to \$60,000.

Photo by Taylor Rattray

Britton Gray

@brittongray

The government of Saskatchewan has released its annual budget and one of the big changes will be to the Active Families Benefit. Only families that have net combined incomes up to \$60,000 will be eligible for the program.

In previous years there was no income-based restriction on the program.

The program is designed to provide a refundable personal income tax credit to assist families with children playing sports and involved in arts programs. The rebate was up to \$150 per child per year under 18 years of age for eligible registration fees.

The program was meant to encourage youth participation in sports and assist families with the high cost of registration.

It was meant to help reduce barriers,

promote access and encourage children to participate in activities that are vital to healthy, active living.

Now Mark Docherty, minister of parks, culture and sports, sees this as a way for the government to focus attention on the families that are in need.

IF YOU THINK ABOUT IT A FAMILY OF FOUR WITH A \$65,000 INCOME WITH HUGE MORTGAGE PAYMENTS AND EVERYTHING ELSE INCREASING PRICES, IT'S STILL GOING TO BE TOUGH TO PUT A KID IN SOCCER AND BALLET."

-CATHY SPROULE

"We decided we're going to income test it. So anyone that's a family earning less than \$60,000 we wanted to make sure that the low income families and vulnerable families still had access to that benefit and that's exactly what we've done," he said.

Cathy Sproule, the NDP critic of parks, culture and sports said this change will cause more kids and families to be left out of the incentive.

"This is only for people who have a need for tax benefits, so families that have enough income to be pay-

ing those taxes, there's a bunch of kids still falling through the cracks," said Sproule. "Limiting it now on an income basis will still shut out a lot of kids. If you think about it a family of four with a \$65,000 income with huge mortgage payments and everything else increasing prices, it's

still going to be tough to put a kid in soccer and ballet."

One of the questions about the program change was how the government came up with the dollar amount for the threshold. Minister Docherty explained the strategy the government used when it came to deciding the number.

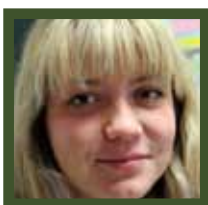
"We worked with the ministry of finance and came up with that number of \$60,000. It was also based on a significant amount of participants, so we found that that was a good line to capture an awful lot of people."

Saskatchewan has one of the highest obesity rates in Canada at 31.6 per cent according to a Statistics Canada Report. Sproule said this change will make it more difficult to get kids participating in physical activity.

TAKING IT TO THE STREETS

"WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE CHANGES TO THE GRAD RETENTION PROGRAM?"

"PEOPLE WHO HAVE GRADUATED ALREADY, I THINK THAT THEY'RE REALLY UPSET ABOUT IT."



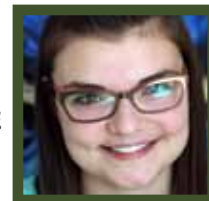
- JAMIE ANDERSON

"I THINK IT'S A NICE IDEA. I'M STILL PROBABLY NOT GOING TO STAY IN SASKATCHEWAN."



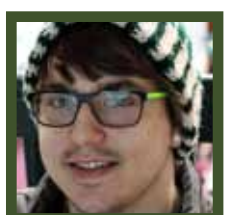
- MITCH HARVEY

"I THINK IT'S KIND OF STRANGE CAUSE YOU'RE STAYING LONGER FOR THE SAME AMOUNT OF MONEY."



- HEATHER HILDEBRANDT

"IT'S QUITE A BIT DIFFERENT."



- DILLON BAST

BUDGET CHOPS DOWN FOREST SERVICES



Forest Services, responsible for managing provincial forest sustainability, saw a decrease in funding by about \$1.3 million compared to last year's budget. Photo by Eric Westhaver

Virginia Wright
@virginiawrightt

The ministry of environment saw cuts in the 2015-2016 provincial budget. Forest Services, responsible for managing provincial forest sustainability, will see an overall decrease in funding from \$12,319,000 last year to \$10,978,000 this year.

This includes \$141,000 cut to forest programs and a \$1.2 million cut to reforestation initiatives. Funding for insect and disease control will remain the same at just under \$2.2 million.

Environment Minister Scott Moe said the \$1.2 million decrease in reforestation is nothing to worry about, considering the government's commitment to reforestation. "We've had a long standing

commitment to reforest a certain amount of property in the province," he said.

Companies sign forest management agreements and, over the last few years, reforestation responsibility has been slightly shifting from the government to the logging com-

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panies, said Moe.

However, Cathy Sproule of the NDP does not agree with the cuts to the environment.

"Everything seems to be down in environment. It isn't even mentioned in this budget document, in the main documents. So clearly it is

not a focus for this government and I think that's very short sighted," said Sproule.

Environmental advocate Joanne Havelock was also disappointed that the big budget announcement didn't include much about the environment. "That's disappointing

The ultimate goal, said Moe, is to have logging companies and those doing logging operations to sign forest management agreements, making them ultimately responsible for reforesting the areas they log.

Sproule does not think this is enough effort by the government.

"We need to boost our reforestation efforts and what I would like to see more of is an effort on reducing our carbon emissions. Obviously, we're the highest per capita in Canada," said Sproule.

-CATHY SPROULE

because maintaining a good environment is really critical to our long term future," said Havelock.

Moe offered assurances that the cuts this will not stop the province's reforestation efforts as the province will maintain its traditional reforestation commitments.

Havelock was hoping for more investment in renewable energy for the province and more aid for the environment as a whole. "It just seems to be short-sighted to be improving roads when you're not putting as much into the natural setting that we are really going to be relying on in the future," said Havelock.

WHAT IS DEFORESTATION?

According to Natural Resources Canada's report *Canada's forests: Key facts*, deforestation is, "The clearing of forests to make way for new, non-forest land uses, such as urban development or agriculture. Land that temporarily has no trees is still considered to be a forest when the trees are expected to grow back- like after fires or harvesting."

FOREST FACTS:

- Canada's forests represent nine per cent of the world's forests
- More than 66 per cent of Canadians get their water from river systems, lakes and reservoirs - sources that largely originate in forested areas
- Each 10 per cent increase in tree cover in an urban area can have the effect of cooling that area by 1° Celsius

FOREST OWNERSHIP

- 94 per cent of forests are on public lands
- Six per cent are on private lands

It is important to note that by law, all forests harvested on public lands must be regenerated.

NO IMMIGRANT SERVICES FUNDING INCREASE

Rafique Bhuiyan
@rafiquebhuiyan

In its 2015 budget, the Saskatchewan government is focused on enabling people to participate in its growing economy, but it's not aggressive on the long-term elements. The new immigrant settlement program funding has no increase or decrease in this budget.

"We are going to get the same commitment this year in terms of immigrant settlement programs," said Jeremy Harrison, minister immigration, jobs, skills and training.

The success of Saskatchewan's immigration strategy is dependent on the province's ability to retain new immigrants and help them get a good start in Saskatchewan.

Last year's budget saw an increase of \$1.5 million, for a total of

\$8.9 million. This year, there is no increase and the budget will remain \$8.9 million.

Agencies supporting Saskatchewan newcomers were authorized for every fiscal year through the Saskatchewan Immigration Settlement Assistance Grant program, Harrison said.

The funds will help the Regina Open Door Society, the Saskatoon Open Door Society, the Moose Jaw Multicultural Council Inc., the Prince Albert Multicultural Council and the Saskatchewan Association of Immigrant Settlement and Integration Agencies Inc. deliver integral immigration settlement and support services in the province.

"We really appreciate settlement agencies. Immigrants and refugees can access the services they need to make the transition to life in Sas-

katchewan both easy and comfortable," Harrison said.

The Saskatchewan government has granted annual funding to these agencies for more than 20 years.

Saskatchewan's settlement programs complement other services and programs offered, such as career and employment services, adult basic education, quick skills training, and post-secondary training.

But new immigrants are not always getting fast, quality service.

"We are new in Saskatchewan. As a newcomer, the first couple of weeks we did not get support as we expected," said Saskatchewan newcomer Shabaz Akter.

He also said his family had to spend all of its money in the first couple of weeks after arrival because no help was offered.

But Harrison said the government put more money in this sector than any other previous government did.

The SINP program province received 11,000 new immigrants last year, and will continue to increase. Last year the federal government allowed Saskatchewan only 4,550 families, but this will increase to 5,500 families in 2015-16.

Part of the government's Plan for Growth is to support the labour market with a supply of skilled employees, attracting new immigrants to the province and encouraging them to make Saskatchewan home according to Harrison.

"Stay tuned, there is maybe some additional good news on the way, particularly for immigrant settlement programs," Harrison said.

SIIT RECEIVES \$428,000 INCREASE



The Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology received a 24 per cent increase in funding, totalling \$428,000.

Photo by Taylor Rattray

Creeden Martell
@creedenmartell

The 2015 Saskatchewan budget has included many cuts and changes to existing programs but it wasn't all doom and gloom. In the area of advanced education, the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology (SIIT) was one of the biggest beneficiaries.

SIIT received \$428,000, a 24 per cent increase over last year's budget, for operating costs. By comparison, the First Nations University of Canada, Gabriel Dumont Institute,

Dumont Technical Institute, and the Northern Teacher Education Program/Northern Professional Access College (NORTEP/NORPAC) received a combined \$210,000.

First Nations University of Canada and Dumont Technical Institute each received a two per cent increase in additional operating funding. Dumont Technical Institute and NORTEP/NORPAC each saw one percent increases in additional operating funding.

Kevin Doherty, minister for advanced education, explained that SIIT had reached out to the Sas-

katchewan government for assistance.

"They're losing faculty members to other institutions because they're not competitive with respect to their salaries," Doherty said. "So, we were able to find an additional \$400,000 to help them with their administration costs."

SIIT also received help with the services they offer to students.

"As well, we have a \$375,000 fund in there we started this fiscal year for student support services," he said. "The president (Riel Bellegarde) made the compelling case

that his biggest challenge is when he gets students at SIIT, he's gotta be able to keep them there. His problem is once they move down from different First Nations in northern Saskatchewan, they have difficulty adjusting to life in Saskatoon or Prince Albert or wherever they're going to school. So, this fund is intended to help them become acclimatized to these different areas they're moving to. That will help (Bellegarde) keep students in school for graduation purposes."

SIIT's funding has increased by 121 per cent since 2007.

NO GROWTH FOR THE ARTS



The budget for the Saskatchewan Arts Board and Creative Sask saw no increases for 2015.

Photo by Kendall Latimer

Kendall Latimer

@klatimer_

Saskatchewan Finance Minister Ken Krawetz's brown leather shoes may have been untraditional but he certainly kept up the tradition of not addressing culture, arts, and heritage during the official budget address. In a thick stack of pre-packaged press releases, mention of the arts is held until the very last page.

Krawetz unveiled the 2015-2016 budget which, at a glance, is quite reminiscent of last year's.

The balanced budget boasts zero tax increases, controlled spending, and low unemployment. It also has directed significant dollars towards investments in infrastructure.

"I can say that I would be surprised to see any major changes," said Nova Alberts, president of the Saskatchewan Media Production Industry Association, when asked what her expectations were regarding funding for arts agencies.

Her prediction was correct. In fact, there were no changes in funding for the Saskatchewan Arts Board or Creative Sask. The numbers are an exact replica of last year.

"We want to, as a government, support all of the creative industries

and we are going to continue to do that through Creative Sask, so it was important that we showed a commitment to the creative industries by offering a stable budget," said Mark Docherty, minister of parks, culture and sport.

"UNTIL CREATIVE SASK GETS ITS ACT TOGETHER, WE DON'T EVEN KNOW WHERE IT'S HEADED, AND THERE SEEMS TO BE A LOT OF CHAOS IN HOW THEY DETERMINE THEIR PROGRAMMING."

"Neutral is better than a cut but what we're seeing is the government having \$144 billion to spend and they're obviously making choices about where they're going to spend it," said Cathy Sproule, NDP culture critic. "We've been calling on the reinstatement of the film employment tax credit for one thing. Creative Sask is in some ways new money, but in some ways it doesn't even cover what the film employment tax credit used to provide for the industry."

Daniel Woloshin said he keeps an eye on Saskatchewan's art community and is disappointed by the zero per cent increase in funding towards the arts, especially the film industry.

"We have already seen the arts

stripped to the core, and as prices of work and living will continue to go up, I feel increasing (the funding) should as well," said Woloshin, who studies political science at the U of R. "When you strip the arts it forces Saskatchewan residents to move out

of province to pursue their passion."

Alberts said she is pleased to see the government hold the line on this budget because she thinks their programs are just starting to work for the film industry. "It would be really unfortunate if their ability to support us was damaged at this time," said Alberts.

"With the state of the economy we weren't anticipating an increase, but the reality is that our industry does need further investments," said Alberts. "We need to get some changes through at Creative Sask so we have the right infrastructure and mechanisms to be able to further grow."

Sproule notes that other creative industries are able to access Creative Sask funding which brings

optimism, however there are still concerns.

"Until Creative Sask gets its act together, we don't even know where it's headed, and there seems to be a lot of chaos in how they determine their programming," said Sproule.

Docherty said the government will be taking a look at Creative Sask over the next year in terms of its impact. "It's our opportunity to look at the organization, and again look at all the pluses and the potential minuses and revamp it," said Docherty.

Last year, Creative Sask's budget increased 18 per cent, from \$6.5 million to \$7.7 million, where it will remain for now. The agency was created to replace the axed Saskatchewan Film Employment Tax credit, as well as all other creative programs in the province.

The Saskatchewan Arts Board's funding was increased by eight per cent over the last two years, but will remain frozen at \$6.9 million this year. The money is directed towards supporting arts organizations.

The money is directed towards supporting arts organizations.

LOAN PROGRAM FOR SMALL BUSINESS CUT



Marilyn Braun-Pollon says the Small Business Loans Association program is winding down due to lack of applicants.

Photo by Taylor Rattray

Taylor Rattray
@tayrattray

For more than 25 years, the Government of Saskatchewan's Small Business Loans Association (SBLA) Program has helped entrepreneurs start and expand their businesses. This will no longer be the case.

The program offered entrepreneurs a loan of up to \$20,000. Its purpose was to help entrepreneurs who might not have otherwise been able to start their business, as well as those who had difficulty obtaining loans through banks or credit unions. Since 1989, it has provided over 11,198 loans to entrepreneurs, totalling more than \$79 million, according to the government's website.

"From what I understand, there wasn't a lot of uptake on the loan program. So, if there's not a lot of uptake (and) not a lot of demand, perhaps there isn't a need for a program," said John Hopkins, CEO of the Regina and District Chamber of Commerce.

With the decline in oil revenue, many people were concerned about program cuts in all areas of government.

"I think what this budget really forced the government to do is to look at all the programs and (ask), 'Are they are being utilized to their best ability, and (are they) the best use of taxpayer dollars?'" said Mari-

"It wasn't a choice between good and bad (programs). In many cases, it was a choice between, 'Well, this is a pretty good program, but we can probably do better,'" said Wall.

The small business sector repre-

"IT WASN'T A CHOICE BETWEEN GOOD AND BAD (PROGRAMS). IN MANY CASES, IT WAS A CHOICE BETWEEN, 'WELL, THIS IS A PRETTY GOOD PROGRAM, BUT WE CAN PROBABLY DO BETTER.'"

- SASKATCHEWAN PREMIER BRAD WALL

lyn Braun-Pollon, vice president of prairie and agri-business with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

"Some good projects (were) funded but not a lot of new jobs (were) created, and there was an expense there. This is a budget with a \$700 million shortfall in oil, where we had to look at everything," said Premier Brad Wall.

Wall said he was involved in regional economic development before he got involved with politics, and was also on a committee that approved some (small business loans).

sents 98 per cent of all businesses in Saskatchewan and employs about one-third of the province's labour force. As the SBLA program ends, some people worry about the affect it will have on the sector.

"It served a purpose of providing support for small business, (so the end of the program) might be a bit of a concern," said Regina Mayor Michael Fougere.

Trent Wotherspoon, NDP economy critic, agrees.

"This program has provided literally hundreds and hundreds of ventures, and allowed entrepreneurs the opportunity to grow a business

and to provide employment, and it's disappointing to see that kind of support for entrepreneurs being eliminated in this budget," said Wotherspoon.

He said that the government should be more involved with Saskatchewan entrepreneurs.

"We believe that we should be working directly with small businesses and entrepreneurs in this province, (and) recognizing what a vital role they play within our economy," said Wotherspoon.

As the program comes to a close, no new loans will be offered. Prior loans will continue to be managed according to the original terms of the loan agreements.

"I think the winding down of it is being done in a responsible way in which that, anybody who has been approved before it closes up at the end of the month will still be approved and then it will run to the end of the term of that loan," said Dwayne Marling, Restaurants Canada VP for Manitoba and Saskatchewan. "So if you're going to wind up a program, that's the way to wind it up."

SUPPLEMENT RULE CHANGE AFFECTS FAMILIES



Finance Minister Ken Krawetz, mid-press conference. This year's budget includes a big rule change for the Sask. Employment Supplement.

Photo by Eric Westhaver

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The 2015-16 Saskatchewan budget includes cuts to many much-needed programs, like the Graduate Retention program, the Active Families Benefit, and the Seniors' Drug Plan. One of the programs that saw the biggest cuts was something else entirely: the Saskatchewan Employment Supplement.

The supplement is a monthly payment that gives support to low-income Saskatchewan families. Meant to add extra income to underpaid work or family support payments, the supplement had a few conditions. The amount paid out to each family varied, according to three factors: the age of the family's children, the amount of the household's income, and the amount of children under 18 years old in the family.

After today's budget, those conditions have changed. From now on, families seeking supplement money will only receive money for children 12 years and younger.

"All that we've changed, quite frankly, is we're recognizing that the child care expenses are predominantly a move for children over the age of 13," said Donna Harpauer, Saskatchewan's minister of social services.

To Harpauer, the program's changes are minimal, and previous recipients of supplement cash will not be affected. "We won't be giving additional dollars for any children under the age of 13. Anyone that

the NDP's urban affairs critic. "This is a really regressive move, it's one that hits families hard, and it's certainly shortsighted in its approach."

"A budget is about choices, and we still think there's record support

'WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT ANY CUT TO THE SES PROGRAM, ESPECIALLY AT A TIME WHEN WE'RE TIED FOR THE LOWEST MINIMUM WAGE NATIONALLY.'

- PETER GILMER

was in the program before, that has a child in that age group, is being grandfathered in, so no one will see a reduction."

However, not everyone at the Legislative Building felt the same way about the change. While families with supplements are being grandfathered into the changed new program, the change in maximum age rules will obstruct people in need in the future.

"This is a hard hit to families that are working incredibly hard to get by. This provided just a little bit of help to take care of some of the basics, and allow families to transition from social assistance, in through training up, and into meaningful employment," says Trent Wotherspoon, deputy leader of the opposition and

for the vulnerable, for low-income people, for disabled people in this province. Record support, and that has not changed with this budget," said Saskatchewan premier Brad Wall. On the other side was NDP MLA David Forbes, who said, "We think this is really a short-sighted cut. It's a program that allows for a lot of benefits, including a gateway to health care benefits."

Forbes, who serves as the NDP's social services critic, said the SES changes will hurt families in need of higher-paying work. "We think this is really going to have an impact on families who are in challenging times, particularly now when we see the low price of oil, and we know that's impacting the workplace and those who have low-income or low-

paying jobs are really going to have some challenges," he said.

"We are concerned about any cut to the SES program, especially at a time when we're tied for the lowest minimum wage nationally. Having that supplement top people up is something that's been very important for low-income families," said Peter Gilmer, a Regina anti-poverty advocate.

Gilmer and his group, the Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry, work in Regina to help underprivileged and impoverished people to a new way of life.

Gilmer said he and the RAPM were surprised by the changes to the supplement. "We're concerned that there's way too many low-income families who aren't able to meet their needs, their needs to housing, child care, etc. The employment supplement cut came as a surprise to us, and we're very surprised about it," he said.

Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall summed up the Sask Party's outlook on these concerns, saying, "A budget is about choices, and we still think there's record support for the vulnerable, for low-income people, for disabled people in this province. Record support. That has not changed with this budget."

SASKATCHEWAN AGRICULTURE CHUGGING ALONG



The province's agriculture remains steady this year.

Photo by Ashley Robinson

Ashley Robinson
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Funding for agriculture is keeping steady in the 2015 Saskatchewan budget.

"The ag budget is \$ 352.4 million and that's down very slightly from what it has been last year and only 2.5 per cent (lower) and that's mainly due to lower costs in crop insurance and things of that nature. There are no significant cuts of any kind," said Lyle Stewart, minister of agriculture.

The 2013 crop production was a record harvest with yields averaging 40 bushels per acre. In 2014, crop production dipped down to just above the 2005 to 2014 average

at 30 bushels per acre.

The 2015 Crop Insurance Program this year has decreased insurance premiums while increasing coverage levels on average from \$162 an acre to \$183 an acre.

"The crop insurance program is improved higher coverage and at less cost...Lower costs and higher crop insurance coverage are always a benefit to producers," said Stewart.

Agriculture critic Cathy Sproule sees the budget as flat.

"What we're not seeing from this government is more emphasis on the grain transportation system which is still in chaos. We would really like to see more leadership there and set out some standards

for. Well, federally, I mean obviously it's a big federal issue but we need this government and this province to push the feds for better grain transportation policy," said Sproule.

Last year the Western Livestock Price Insurance Program was introduced. This year's budget has seen nothing taken away and nothing added, making producers happy.

"Well, I think it's very good they've balanced it. I've got money for infrastructure and no tax increases. How can a guy complain about that," said Doug Gillespie, president for the Saskatchewan Stock Growers Association.

"We weren't expecting anything new and I didn't really see anything new for agriculture. But on the beef

cattle side, prices are good and we're having good years," said Ryan Beierbach, vice-chair for the Saskatchewan Cattlemen's Association.

"(The Budget's) exactly what we were hoping for. We knew it was going to be a tough budget so we were hoping for no new tax increases, which we got, and no significant spending cuts, which we got," said Norm Hall, president of the Agriculture Producers Association of Saskatchewan.

Overall, both government and producers are happy with this year's budget.

"For ag I think it's a pretty good-news budget," said Stewart.

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Published eight times a year by the University of Regina School of Journalism. Opinions published in the INK do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the University of Regina, the School of Journalism, or any of its affiliates. The School of Journalism is Western Canada's first journalism program—established in 1980 at the University of Regina as the School of Journalism and Communications—and is the only school on the Prairies with a master's program. The school is represented by over 600 graduates working in news media and communications at all levels, across Canada and around the world.

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